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Quest. 1. *Whether a Death-bed Repentance may be sincere?*

Answ. There is an infinite hazard that attends a DEATH-BED *Repentance*. *Then venture not Eternity upon your last breath*; make Religion your early, your continual Business, your Duty, your Obligation; which will administer *a delightful Reflection* on your following years; prove the truest Frugality and Improvement of Time, the greatest Ease and Quiet, comfort and safety both of *Life and Death*. All men seek the Lord some time or other, only wise men betimes, while he may be found.—— " All sorts of men, (*says a Learned* " * *Writer*) that have gone before us into an Eternal " state, have left this great Observation behind them, That " upon Experience they have found, that what Vain " Thoughts soever men may in the heat of their Youth " and Lust entertain of Religion, they will sooner or " later feel a Testimony God hath given it in every mans " breast, which will one day make them serious, either " by the inexpressible Fears, Terror and Agonies of a " troubled mind, or the unconceivable Peace, Comfort " and Joy of a good conscience.——Of this Truth we think *the Penitential Letter* written by Sir *DUNCOMB COLCHESTER*, late of *Westbury* in *Glocestershire* [which *Letter* is affixt to Mr. *TURNER's Essay upon the Works of Creation and Providence*, Newly publisht, is perhaps as Extraordinary an Instance as this present Age has either read or heard of; And that his Repentance was sincere, is evident by his causing (*in his Life-time*) the said *LETTER* to be read in the Parish-Churches of *Michel-Dean* (the place near which he lived) and *Westbury*; and shewn to such *Gentlemen, Friends and others*, as might bring God most Glory. And as a further Argument of his *sincerity*, he *signed and delivered the said LETTER in the presence of several of his Friends*.——He continued his REPENTANCE and RESOLUTION to the Last, often, and very freely declaring upon all Occasions the *Horrour he had suffered in his Soul for his sinful Life past*, far exceeding all that he had suffered in his Body, which was very great; his sence of the *wonderful mercy of God* to him, and that he would *die rather than commit the least willful sin*.—— For a *further account* of this Extraordinary Instance, we refer you to Mr, *TURNER's ESSAY* (before mentioned), where you'll find a *true Copy of this Letter*, with other Instances of the like Nature.—— We ought to take *Example by such Instances* as these, to be serious in the matter of our Eternal concernments; and not to put off *our Repentance to a Deathbed*, lest we be made Examples our selves.—— As to the Question, *Whether a Death-bed Repentance may be sincere?* We answer, in the Words of a late Author: " *It's in* " *vain to ask whether God cannot save a Man after a vici-* " *ous life, since his own Will seems to restrain his Power*; " *that he will not save men without a recovery to Holiness.* " *He is Holy, Just, and True, as well as Merciful.* The same word that informs us *He is merciful* and *gracious*, likewise tells us, *He will by no means clear the guilty*. That *if we live after the flesh, we shall die*. That he cannot *lye*, nor *deny Himself*. *I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord*; *wherefore turn your selves, and live*; implying, except we *turn to him*, his *Mercy* will do us no good. What Reason have we to expect *it*, *which* we have used to evil purposes, and his dishonour? That he should work Miracles for us, while we despise the means? *Cause the Sun to stand still for us*, because we have trifled away our day? Turn stones into Bread, for us who have been slothful, and are ready to perish? That he should stand ready for us with *that grace* at last, which we have so long refused and rejected. God is as peremptory for the *Time*, and *Season*, as for the *Duty* it self. There's a Time when he will not be found, nor accept our Offering. *The Day of Grace*, lasteth not so long as the day of his Patience: The fruitless Fig-tree stood still in the Vineyard, uncut down, but withered away under that fatal Curse; *Never Fruit grow on thee more*. Tho he will pardon the Infirmities of the sincere, yet *there's a certain Period set for the return of sinners, beyond which, all their Industry is ineffectual*. *Jerusalem* neglected the day of her Visitation, and the things of her Peace were irrevocably hid from her Eyes: *Esau* found no place of Repentance (in his Father) tho he sought it carefully with Tears: The *Foolish Virgins* saw, and were troubled, that they wanted *Oil*, and endeavoured after it, but too late, the *door was shut, and no knocking powerful enough for their admission*.

* Dr. Lloyd *in his fair warning to a careless world.*

The design of *the Parable of the Vineyard*, (so grosly abus'd) where those that went into it at the *last hour*, were rewarded equally with those *that bore the burden and heat of the day*; was to teach the *Jews*, that, tho God had chose them first to be his People, yet at the *Eleventh* hour (*i.e.* in Gospel Times, or end of the world) He would call in, accept of, and reward the *Gentiles* as largely as they, notwithstanding their repining and murmuring at this his Grace and Mercy; *the reward being to all, of Grace, and not of Debt*. At least it's no Advantage or Encouragement to those that are call'd upon and ingaged, yet refuse, and delay coming in, till old Age; Adjourn their serving God, to their going out of the world; for those, that went in at the *Eleventh hour*, were not call'd before, but found *Standing Idle, because no man had hired them*.

And as for *the Thief upon the Cross*, it's *a rare Example*, not confirm'd by any Promise: It's a *single Example*, without a parallel in the whole Word of God: It's an *extraordinary Example* ranked among the Miracles Christ wrought when he left the world: It's *an example impertinently alledg'd* to warrant *delay in us*, who have the sound of the Gospel continually in our Ears, yet wretchedly cheat our selves of the *Remedy* of our miserable Condition, by adjourning the use of it to a late and uncertain futurity, which seldom or never succeeds well. Vain Men, to conclude an Universal Law, from *one single Instance*; a *personal Grace* and *Priviledge*, extended to *that one person*, that stood close to that sacrifice, that was offering it self up to God; when the Conqueror was Triumphing over Principalities and Powers, and making a shew of them openly upon the Cross; and displaying the Power of the dying Mediator, to forgive sins in his lowest Humiliation. The Scriptures, that are an History of more than Five Thousand years, have but *this one Instance* of *one* accepted upon a *Death-Bed Repentance*; and in that, such an extraordinary Conjunction of Circumstances, as will never fall out again. No man *professing Christianity, hath any Reason to expect to save as this Thief did, till Christ come into the world, and suffer again, and that between two Thieves, and be be alive at that time and place where he suffers, and be one of the Thieves, and the good one too*; exercising so many Acts of a true Repentance and lively Faith in Christ, when (probably) first Preached to him; when he saw him in so despicable a state, under all the Infamy and Misery of a shameful and painful Death, and nothing to make such a greatness as he ascribed to him, probable; which will never be. But further concerning the *Thief upon the Cross*, it is observable,

First, That it appears not of him, (nor have we any reason to charge it on him) that he ever *procrastinated*, or purposely posted off his *Conversion to this so late a date*; and so he will not be matter of Comfort to them that do.

Secondly, That as far as we have any knowledge, he seems not *ever to have heard of Christ*, at least, to have been called or *instructed by him*, till he met him upon the *Cross*; and consequently he can be no President to

to any that have lived an *Age*, or great part of it, under the preaching of the *Gospel*.

Thirdly, That for the *Thief* to be *converted* then, and *believe in Christ* in that state of greatest Humility, upon the *Cross*, (which so *scandalized the Jews*, when by all other Motives they were inclined to believe on him) was a most notable, illustrious *eminent Act of Faith*, and ought in any reason to be preferred before that which is ordinarily found among men.

Fourthly, That it was accompanyed with as many *Effects* of *sincere Conversion* as that condition was capable of, *Confession of Christ, and devout Prayer to him for his Mercy, or remembrance when he came to his Kingdom.*

Fifthly, That it was not extorted by the *fear of Death*, but proceeded from a sight and *acknowledgment* of the *Innocency* and *Power* of Christ, even upon the Cross; and this was an Argument to himself and others, (and was, it seems, so acknowledged by Christ) of the sincerity of his *Faith*, and *Conversion to God*; and that being supposed sincere, will undoubtedly be accepted, *be it never so late.*

Sixthly, This was done by the *Thief* in the midst of all *Temptations* to the contrary; the *Cross* one great *Temptation*, and such as almost all the Disciples were shaken with; and besides, the other *Thief* was his *Tempter* to the contrary, *railing on Christ*, &c. *Luk.* 23. 39. *And also the chief Priests, and Scribes, and Elders mocked him, and they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads*, Mat. 27. And so that *new-convert-Thief* was a *singular* person, almost the only *Confessor* in the company. These particulars being observed, will give us reason to acknowledge the difference great betwixt the example of the *Thief*, and any that make use of that example to *defer their Repentance* till the last; and will consequently *advertise* us, that though it *succeeded* very *well* to him, it may *succeed* very *ill* to us.

They dreadfully mistake themselves, that crowd up *Repentance into so narrow a Room, as a Sick-Bed*, when Men have scarce Time to reckon up all the particular Duties that make it up. That imagine the Tree that hath been always Barren, should bring forth good Fruit now it is a cutting down: That a man should live a life of Holiness, when he is just a dying: That a weak infirm Person, of disabled, disturbed Faculties, should build that in *three days*, which others, notwithstanding all their Abilities and Diligence, find hard enough to do in *forty Years*: That those who have had the knowledge of God, and been call'd upon all their lives to give up themselves to him, should be accepted when they pour out to him instead of the generous Spirits of Life, the *Lees and Dregs of it*. When the blood cools in the Veins, and the Spirits are ready to stand still, the *season* of the *pleasures of sin* is over, and a man is no longer to live *where they are*; to cast himself upon Religion, when there's nothing else to vie with it, when all things else fail: That he must take us in at night, tho he hath in vain stretch'd out to us his hand all the day long; as if this state were *prepared only for a stage for men to act their Vices and Exorbitances upon*; and then God should remove them to Heaven, that have but just begun to acknowledge him by some weak Devotion, extorted even out of necessity, and given the bulk of their time to sin; that have sacrificed the *Male of their Flock to Lust*, and even with impious designs kept the corrupt thing for him. That the easie Yoak, the light Burthen, which cost the Son of God his Life to obtain Heaven upon, an intolerable Load, and to be had on easier Terms. That God should have only the *faint and feeble services of a Death-bed, for his Mercies vouchsafed us all our days*? That he should accept of such a Commutation for the Obedience due to him, as a *Death-bed-Repentance*, a few Sighs, and Groans, Tears, Promises, flutterings of Devotion, in exchange for all our Duties, sufficient to *expiate* a whole life of *Impiety*, with a breath to retract all the dishonour we have done him in it; as if he had made us to take the *Delights* he most abhors, and after all to give us such a *Stupendious Reward*. *From the Word of God Men have no Promise to warrant such a Confidence*; If they have, let them shew it; if they have not, they must thank (or rather Condemn) *themselves*, for bringing *themselves* into a Condition without the *Covenant*, without a *promise*, *hopeless*, and *miserable*. And oh! how *miserable* must he needs be, that lyes upon the *brink of Eternity*, *encountering* the throws and horrors of an *Imminent Dissolution*, the doubts what will become of him in another World, the fears of *Hell*, the uproars of a guilty *Conscience*; whom God hath left to the Boyling *Sea* of his own *Terrors*, and thrown him out no *Anchor of Hope*.

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